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Genc Lafi

Università del Salento

## *On the semantic evolution of Albanian motër 'sister' and vajzë 'girl' in the context of the Albanian extended family*

*Në kujtim të Xhanit*

*Gianni Belluscio In Memoriam*

### **Abstract**

*The Albanian extended family includes more generations, elder people, parental couples, all unmarried children and married sons with their wives and children living in the same household. The organization and the function of the extended family take a central place in the Albanian Customary Law (often referred to as Kanun). Its origins reach far back in antiquity. In Northern Albania it has survived in its classical form until the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.*

*Alb. motër (older motërë) 'sister' has been deemed as a reflex of the Pre-Indo-European word for MOTHER in nearly all other Indo-European languages. The semantic change MOTHER → SISTER has been long discussed, reaching no convincing conclusions. Recently M. Majer (2019) has put forward a keen and well argued proposal, reconstructing a PIE derivative \*meh<sub>2</sub>t(e)reh<sub>2</sub> 'of the mother' as the preform of motër(ë). Such a reconstruction fits well in a hypothesis that takes into account the structural frame of the Albanian extended family as described above, as well as the disputed origin of vajzë 'girl' from PIE \*swesor- 'sister'.*

**Keywords:** *Extended family; Albanian Customary Law Code (Kanun); mother; sister; girl; Indo-European; semantic change.*

### 1. Linguistic-historical premises

The Albanian language belongs to the Indo-European language-family. Its word for SISTER, *motër*, older forms *motërë*, *motrë*, has been deemed since ever as a reflex of the reconstructed PIE word for ‘mother’, *\*māter*<sup>1</sup>, or *\*meh<sub>2</sub>ter*<sup>2</sup>-, according to the latest state of art in the Indo-European studies. A recent paper from M. Majer (2019)<sup>3</sup> has revived the interest on this still unsettled issue, which has not yet provided a satisfactory response concerning the semantic shift MOTHER → SISTER.

The above-mentioned etymological explanation, first put forward in Meyer 1891<sup>4</sup>, has been widely accepted in the albanological studies and in the etymological dictionaries of Albanian (Meyer 1891: 287–288; Çabej 2014: 371; Huld 1984: 96; Orel 1998: 275; Topalli 2017: 1009). G. Meyer and the other above-mentioned scholars proceed from a word-form *motrë*

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<sup>1</sup>An asterisk (\*) preceding a word stays for unattested, reconstructed linguistic word-forms.

<sup>2</sup>An *h<sub>2</sub>* stays for a reconstructed Pre-Indo-European laryngeal phoneme, which is supposed to have “colored” in *a* the preceding *e* in this word. Most linguists reconstruct three PIE laryngeals, graphically expressed as *h<sub>1</sub>*, *h<sub>2</sub>*, *h<sub>3</sub>*.

<sup>3</sup>M. Majer, *The Indo-European Prehistory of the Albanian word for ‘sister’*; pre-publication version; definitive version to be published in the proceedings of: *Ljubilej – Ljubljäum – Ljubilee – Ljubljanniversaire* IG/SIES/SÉIE Arbeitstagung (100 years of comparative linguistics at the University of Ljubljana; Ljubljana, 4–7 June 2019), in:

[https://www.academia.edu/41133445/The\\_Indo\\_European\\_prehistory\\_of\\_the\\_Albanian\\_word\\_for\\_sister?](https://www.academia.edu/41133445/The_Indo_European_prehistory_of_the_Albanian_word_for_sister?email_work_card=view-paper)

[email\\_work\\_card=view-paper](https://www.academia.edu/41133445/The_Indo_European_prehistory_of_the_Albanian_word_for_sister?email_work_card=view-paper), last accessed 15<sup>th</sup> December 2020.

<sup>4</sup>G. Meyer, *Etymologisches Wörterbuch der albanesischen Sprache* 1891, 227-228.

(Mod. Alb. *motër*), which is supposed to derive from the Indo-European *\*māter* 'mother'. In OAlb. the word is attested as *motërë* in the meaning 'sister' in the first document of Albanian, the Missal of Gjon Buzuku (1555) in the form *të motërë*<sup>5</sup>. There are no traces of the meaning 'mother' in written Albanian or in its dialects, so the semantic shift MOTHER → SISTER dates back to the prehistory of the Albanian language, long before Albanian was attested. G. Meyer concludes that "this word meant in any case the eldest sister in Albanian, who, after the death of the mother, took her place in the household"<sup>6</sup>. This hypothesis has been approved by Jokl (1923, LKU: 39), Tagliavini (1965: 118) Çabej (2014: 371), Orel (1998: 275) and recently Topalli (2017: 1009).

Consequently it is assumed that the semantic change in question reflects some particular aspects in the structure of the (Pre-)Albanian society, namely that the eldest of the sisters would take care of her younger siblings after the mother's death, thus fulfilling the role of mother, assuming that the death of the mother at a relatively young age must have been such a frequent event to induce a semantic change in Pre-Albanian. Thus it would have to be explained by anthropological circumstances.

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<sup>5</sup>The proclitic *të* often precedes family nouns, meaning "own". It precedes family terms of the inherited lexicon (*i ati* 'own father', *e ëma* 'own mother', *i vëllai* 'own brother', *e motra* 'own sister') and borrowings from Latin (*i ungji* 'own uncle', *e emta* 'own aunt', but not such from Turkish (starting from the 15<sup>th</sup> century). In OAlb. *të* is used more frequently than in Mod. Alb., thus being an indicator of ancientness.

<sup>6</sup>Meyer 1891, 227-228: "Das Wort hat im Alb. jedenfalls die älteste Schwester bezeichnet, welche nach dem Tode der Mutter deren Stellung im Haushalte einnahm".

Huld (1984: 96) puts forward another hypothesis, suggesting the so-called Omaha-kinship system<sup>7</sup> for the pre-Albanian society:

In Omaha-kinship<sup>8</sup> systems of terminology as is reconstructed for Pre-Indo-European, the term ‘mother’ extends to the mother’s sister and her daughters (...). If the intermediate kinship terminology of the pre-Albanians was of the Hawaiian type<sup>9</sup>, then these cousin terms would come to mean ‘sibling’ as well. The transfer to ‘sibling’ only was facilitated by the rise of Eskimo-type terms in the early Middle Ages when ‘cousin’ was borrowed from Latin<sup>10</sup>.

H. Barić (1955: 57–58), suggests that the shift in meaning was caused by contact with a Pre-Indo-European substrate, supposing that the word *motër* has changed the meaning from ‘mother’, as in other Indo-European languages, to ‘sister’ in Albanian, because the kinship terminology in Albanian has been influenced by the matriarchal Mediterranean system.

Other scholars have suggested different solutions.

On the other hand Alb. *vajzë* ‘girl, maiden’ (by extension ‘daughter’), dial. archaic word-form *varzë* (from which *vajzë*, *vajë*, *vashë* descend) has been linked to VIRGIN (Lat. *virgo*, Gk.

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<sup>7</sup>Indeed the Indo-European kinship system matches closer with the Omaha-kinship one (cf. Fortson 2010: 21).

<sup>8</sup>In the Omaha-kinship systems *Ego’s* father and his brothers are merged and addressed by a single term, and a similar pattern is used for *Ego’s* mother and her sisters.

<sup>9</sup>In the Hawaiian type all brothers and male cousins are referred to as *Brother*, and all sisters and female cousins as *Sister*.

<sup>10</sup>In the Eskimo type parental siblings are distinguished only by their sex (Aunt, Uncle). All children of these individuals are lumped together regardless of sex (Cousins).

παρθένος, cf. Barić 1919, 113-114). Çabej (2006: 219-220) instead explains *varzë* as a diminutive of Alb. *varrë* 'wound', by extension 'slit', referring to the female sexual organ (and supposedly to the beginning of the menstruation cycles), which looks rather a bizarre and fancy explanation.

An innovative approach has been suggested by E. Hamp<sup>11</sup> in a short paper, where he reconstructs a preform *\*v(ë)arë*, *\*var* for *vajzë* /*vashazë* 'girl'<sup>12</sup>, suggesting that *vajzë* derives from PIE *\*swesór-* 'sister'<sup>13</sup>, where the ending *-zë* is a diminutive suffix. Hamp's etymology of *vajzë* from PIE *\*swesór-* 'sister' is disputed<sup>14</sup>, but formally it is the most matching one<sup>15</sup>, relying on regular Albanian sound changes and word-formation rules<sup>16</sup>. In this context Hamp supposes that once the reflex of *\*swesor-*

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<sup>11</sup>Hamp, Eric P. 1986: *Alb. vajzë, motrë*. In: Roncaglia, Carlo Messori/Pellegrini, Giovan Battista (eds.): *Studi albanologici, balcanici, bizantini e orientali in onore di Giuseppe Valentini*. Firenze: 109–110.

<sup>12</sup>Rather surprisingly Hamp does not mention here the documented dial. word-form *varzë*.

<sup>13</sup>Cf. Ved. *svásar*, Lat. *soror*, OCS *sestrinъ*, Oir. *siur*, Goth. *swistar*, Ger. *Schwester*, Eng. *sister* etc. Evidence from other IE languages suggests an initial accent (on *swé-*). However the probability of an accent shift *swesór-* for the PALb. is confirmed by *vëllá* 'brother' < *swe-laud-*, *swe-lough-* (see below).

<sup>14</sup>Recently Majer 2019: 6: "this particular aspect, which is the focus point of the theory, is less convincing. According to Hamp, PIE *\*swesor-* would have become Pre-Alb. *\*var* via a combination of phonological and analogical changes. The required phonological processes are not uncontroversial, however, and the sheer number of innovations assumed (to which must be added the shift in meaning from 'sister' to 'girl, daughter' and the suffixation with *-zë*) makes the explanation rather cumbersome. This is not to say, however, that a satisfactory etymology of this item is at hand; it remains rather enigmatic".

<sup>15</sup>Orel 1998: 493; Topalli 2017: 1541.

took the meaning ‘girl’ in Albanian), it became necessary “to specify ‘true-/uterine sister/girl’ through a phrase ‘mother’s girl’: *\*mātrā var-*, thus yielding the elliptic construction *motrë (var-)*. The head noun was then deleted, surviving only in the extended sense”<sup>17</sup>.

Building on Hamp’s approach, M. Majer (2019: 7-8) reconstructs in his keen and well argued paper a PIE derivative *\*meh<sub>2</sub>t(e)reh<sub>2</sub>* ‘of the mother’, which has yielded PALb. *\*māterā*<sup>18</sup> and in turn OAlb. *motërë* ‘sister’:

...a (Post-)PIE adjective *\*meh<sub>2</sub>t(e)r-o/eh<sub>2</sub>-* could mean either ‘having a mother’ or ‘of the mother, associated with the mother’. It could be interpreted also as ‘sibling’ meaning ‘having the same mother’ or ‘of [the same] mother’, respectively. In this way, *\*meh<sub>2</sub>t(e)r-e-h<sub>2</sub>* ‘woman having/of [the same] mother’ could be lexicalized as a replacement of the inherited PIE *\*swesor-* [‘sister’]. The same PIE preform *\*meh<sub>2</sub>t(e)r-o/eh<sub>2</sub>-* is also reflected in Gr. *μήτρα* ‘womb’, meaning originally ‘of mother’.

Similar semantic developments surface in other languages as well, as in Gr. *ἀδελφός* ‘brother’ < *\*sṃ-g<sup>w</sup>elb<sup>h</sup>-es-* ‘of the same

<sup>16</sup>Regarding the phonological aspect, *\*swesor-* yields regularly a PALb. form *\*swesarā*, which in turn, according to the Albanian historical phonetics, produces *\*vēharë* > *\*varë* (Orel 1998: 493). The initial *swe-* changes regularly to *vë-* (cf. *vëlla* ‘brother’ < PIE *swe-loudh-*; *swe-lough-* ‘(from) own kin/people’). A PIE intervocalic *\*s* changes also to *-h-* and an PIE *\*o* changes regularly to *a* in PALb (cf. Schumacher-Matzinger 2013: 262; 211). The diminutive *-zë* appears commonly in derivatives (e.g. *vezë* ‘egg’ < *ve* id.). For the semantic shift SISTER → GIRL, (DAUGHTER being a semantic extension of GIRL) cf. below.

<sup>17</sup>Hamp 1986: 110.

<sup>18</sup>Precisely *\*māterā*; a form *\*māterā* would not have yielded *motërë*.

womb'<sup>19</sup>, or in Sp. *hermano*, Port. *irmão*, Cat. *germà* 'brother' < Lat. *germānus* 'of [one's own] kin, real, full', ultimately a derivative of *germen* 'seed'<sup>20</sup>.

Also the Alb. word for BROTHER, *vëlla*, derives from a similar compound (of Indo-European linguistic material) *\*swe-laud-*; *swe-slough-* 'own kin', '(from) the same bed', or similar<sup>21</sup>. Lastly, the same path of semantic change can be inferred even for the PIE word for SISTER itself: its reconstructed form *\*swesor-/swesr-* has been explained as a determinative compound of *\*swe-* 'own' and *\*sor-* 'woman', meaning 'woman of own kin'<sup>22</sup>.

## *2. The Albanian extended family in the Kanun*

The Northern Albanian Customary Law Code, or *Kanun*, reflects many legal practices and situations of antiquity. Remaining in the Indo-European environment, "the laws governing such matters as hospitality, the rights of the heads of households, marriage, blood-feuds and payment of damages find precise echoes in Vedic India and ancient Greece and Rome" (Fortson 2010: 448).

The *Family* is one of the core subjects of the Albanian Customary Law in all its versions (*Kanuni i Lekë Dukagjinit*, *Kanuni i Skënderbeut* etc.). The family is defined as "a group of human beings who live under the same roof, whose aim is to increase their number by means of marriage for their establishment and the evolution of their state, and for the

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<sup>19</sup>Beekes EDG (V. 1: 20).

<sup>20</sup>de Vaan 2008: 260–261.

<sup>21</sup>Jokl 1923: 41–46; Orel 1998: 503–504; Topalli 2017: 1565.

<sup>22</sup>For a full handling of this argument see Hardarson 2014.

development of their reason and intellect”<sup>23</sup>. It is composed of more married couples (*nuclei*), who live and work together in the domain of a single social unity, as noticed by many travellers and scholars who have coped with the issue. Cozzi (1943: 238) notes that “the base of the family law is the community, or the gathering of more families or persons, who live in the same house under the guide of a single head<sup>24</sup>, or *patriarch (i zoti i shpìs)*<sup>25</sup> cultivating together the undivided property for the common benefit”<sup>26</sup>. The definition of G. Valentini (1940: 168) notes that “we cannot say the concept of legal person is fully realised in the Albanian [customary] law, except that in the family. Indeed inside the family the single individuals don’t even consider themselves as distinguishable persons”<sup>27</sup>. M. E. Durham, a British artist, anthropologist and

<sup>23</sup>Fox 1989: 14. The definition of the family comes from *Filosofia del diritto*, Abate Felice, N. 2726.

<sup>24</sup>Cf. the definition of the Head of the House in the *Kanun of Lekë Dukagjini* (Fox 1989: 14): “According to the Kanun, the control of the house belongs to the eldest living under the roof of the house or to his first brother. If he does not possess those qualities which are required to fulfil this office properly, then – on the basis of common consent – another member of the household is chosen, who is wiser, more intelligent and more careful. The head of the house may also be an unmarried man”. Note that in the Kanun *shpi* ‘house’ is used mainly in the meaning ‘household; (extended) family’.

<sup>25</sup>Lit. ‘the master of the house’.

<sup>26</sup>“La base del diritto di famiglia è la comunità, ossia la riunione di più famiglie o persone che abitano nella stessa casa sotto la direzione di un solo capo (*i zoti i shpìs*), coltivando la proprietà indivisa e godendo i frutti in comune”.

<sup>27</sup>“...potremmo dire non verificarsi appieno nel diritto albanese il concetto della persona giuridica se non nella famiglia. Anzi quasi possiamo dire che nel seno della famiglia i singoli individui non si ritengono nemmeno come persone fisiche distinte tra loro”.



writer who became famous for her anthropological accounts of life in Albania in the early 20th century, notes that “the *family* was the entity; the individual had no separate existence” (Durham 2000: 35); every individual could act outside the group only as a representative of it.

The Albanian traditional family belongs to the so-called *extended family*, or more precisely to the *joint family*. This is a type of familial group that extends beyond the nuclear family, consisting of parents like father, mother, and their children, aunts, uncles, grandparents, and cousins, all living in the same household often under the same roof. Extended families are the basic family unit in many cultures around the world even today. Sharing a common household offers many specific advantages, such as such as a greater sense of security and belonging due to sharing a wider pool of members to serve as resources during a crisis, and more role models to help perpetuate desired behaviour and cultural values. “Even in cultures in which adults are expected to leave home after marriage to begin their own nuclear-based households, the extended family often forms an important support network offering similar advantages. Particularly in working-class communities, grown children tend to establish their own households within the same general area as their parents, aunts, uncles, and grandparents. These extended family members tend to gather often for family events and to feel responsible for helping and supporting one another, both emotionally and financially” (Browne 2011: 107).

What applies to present-day situations, can be reasonably applied to antique situations as well. For the above-mentioned reasons this type of family has been predominant in the mountainous area of Northern Albania, where life has been always harsh and the resources are scarce even in the present

days, having survived in its classical form until the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The extended family appears also in the context of the South-Slavic *zadruga*<sup>28</sup>, which shows a very similar structure to the Albanian extended family.

### 3. *Tracing the evolution of some kinship terms by means of linguistic evidence*

Actually we don't know exactly how the structure of the antique (Pre-)Albanian family looked like, but we can trace back some of its features at least to the Albanian-Latin cultural-linguistic contacts, starting around the 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C. The actual Albanian family structure is predominantly of Eskimo type, distinguishing between parental siblings not only by sex (Aunt, Uncle), but also by descent (Maternal vs. Paternal Aunt/Uncle). This distinction arose as a result of the Albanian-Turkish linguistic and cultural contacts (15<sup>th</sup> - beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century). The terms for 'parental aunt' (*hallë*), 'parental uncle' (*xhaxha*; *axhë*<sup>29</sup>), 'maternal aunt' (*teze*) and 'maternal uncle' (*dajë*; *dai*<sup>30</sup>) are all of Turkish origin (respectively *hala*, *amca*, *teyze*, *dayı*) and mean the same as in Turkish. There are no traces of a distinction by descent (maternal vs. paternal) prior to the period of Turkish influence in Albanian; therefore we can assume that this feature arose surely due to the Turkish influx. Similarly, the terms for 'aunt', 'uncle' and 'cousin', which predate the Turkish influence, are of Latin origin: *emtë* 'aunt' <

<sup>28</sup>The Balkan *zadruga* is generally formed of one extended family consisting of married brothers and their families. The members of a *zadruga* lived in a single household and functioned as an agricultural and economic unit. The *zadruga* held its property, herds, and money in common, with the oldest capable patriarch usually ruling and making decisions for the family.

<sup>29</sup>Dial. (N. Albania).

<sup>30</sup>Dial. (S. Albania).

*amita*; *ungj* 'uncle' < *avunculus* (with no distinction of descent)<sup>31</sup> and *kushëri* (fem. *kushërirë*)<sup>32</sup> 'cousin' < *consobrinus*. Hence we can infer that these distinctions in the kinship terminology expressed by Latin loanwords much probably have appeared in (Pre-)Albanian as a result of the Latin influx. We don't have Pre-Albanian linguistic evidence to support this assertion, but the structure of the Albanian extended joint family as reflected in the *Kanun* sheds some light at least regarding the concept of COUSIN. In the *Kanun* *kushëri* 'cousin' and the collective *kushrini* 'all the cousins' are always used in a context implying those cousins who don't live in the same household. When referring instead to people living in the same household, the generic term *robt e shpis* 'home folks' is used. Another term, *prindja* 'parents' (< Lat. *parentem*)<sup>33</sup>, is used in the *Kanun* as a collective noun referring not only to the biological parents, but also to the adults living in the same household (including mostly males, as well as the mother or other important women), who, among other things, have the right to decide on betrothals of the young family members (sons and daughters). Also the term *bijë* 'daughter' is often used in reference to the extended family whose the young woman belongs, rather than to its biological parents (*bijë shpie*, lit. 'daughter of the house').

Interestingly in Mod. Alb. the originally Lat. meaning of *prind(je)*, 'parent', is preserved, while in the *Kanun*'s usage it extends to include more adult relatives living in the same household in relation to the youngsters. The motivation that underlies this documented semantic change (extension) is

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<sup>31</sup>*Emtë* and *ungj* are actually outdated, having been replaced in the current usage by the Turkish loanwords *hallë*, *teze*, *xhaxha*, *dajë*, as shown above.

<sup>32</sup>Both are currently used in Albanian.

<sup>33</sup>Mod. Alb. *prind* 'parent'.

evident and helpful to understand the motivation of similar linguistic changes which could have occurred early in the language prehistory, thus remaining undocumented.

#### 4. *From SISTER to GIRL and from MOTHERLY to SISTER*

The Albanian extended family is based on a patrilocal system, i.e. when a girl married, she left her parents' family and joined that of her husband. Consequently, the unmarried female individuals were generally girls at the age of childhood and in their teens, all living together, the children being taken care collectively from the women of the household and the female teenagers sharing the household chores.

In mountainous areas as those of the Balkans the geographical features have conditioned the urban structure of the settlements, which until late often consisted of scattered households very distant from each other and difficult to reach, especially in winter. In these households an extended, or joint family, used to live under the same roof. These kinds of villages are typical among other for the Northern Albanian Alps. As a consequence the family, and specially its female members, who had to take care of the domestic work in the house or in its immediate roundabouts, remained among themselves for long periods of time in a practically exclusive environment. In a similar context a conceptual tendency of considering/defining the children from different couples living together as siblings is developed and/or preserved. The terms for sibling (*vëlla* 'brother' and *motër* 'sister') until recently have been often extended to all the descendants of a supposed common ancestor in the popular usage, recalling the Hawaiian kinship system (see above in 1). There are many examples from both Northern and Southern Albania showing that all youngsters from villages which are said

to have been founded by common ancestors (brothers) don't intermarry, considering themselves siblings, defining each other *vëlla* 'brother' and *motër* 'sister' and relating accordingly to each other<sup>34</sup>. This offers a precondition for the semantic change SISTER → GIRL proposed by Hamp (1986: 110), by using *\*vëharë*/*\*var* in the meaning GIRL AND SISTER as a superordinate term, because the *sisters* living in the household were regularly all the young, unmarried females, i.e. *girls*.

This in turn has caused semantic fuzziness and the weakening of the status of the immediate sibling in the group (if that notion already existed in the actual form). Therefore the more generic meaning GIRL has prevailed, probably after a period of polysemic use. As a result the need arose to avoid polysemy and restore semantic sharpness to the concept (FULL) SISTER through a lexical innovation. One of the possible ways is the identification of the female immediate siblings (sisters) by means of their descent from the same mother in the female group of the family<sup>35</sup>. This has triggered the lexicalization of the

<sup>34</sup>I have been told from locals in the '90s about three villages near Ballsh (S. Albania), which were said to have been founded by three brothers in the remote past, that the young, unmarried men and women there considered themselves to be siblings. For example they used to take a long walk together, even in a couple young man + young woman, to go and watch movies in the town during the 1950's (the cinema had just arrived in rural Albania by then) and come back home very late in the night. In the Albanian rural, highly conservative environment of the time, such a behaviour was deemed quite normal and not regarded as scandalous, which would have been surely the case, if they were not considered (from the community) as brothers and sisters.

<sup>35</sup>This option seems more probable since the girls spent most of the time in the household with the female family members; consequently the reference to the mother (through '[girl] of mother' seems the best way for a clear identification in the familial environment.

elliptical structure *\*māt(e)rā (var)* ‘(girl) of [the same] mother’ in PALb.<sup>36</sup>, which has ended up yielding OAlb. *motërë*, Mod. Alb. *motër*, as first suggested by Hamp and further elaborated in Majer’s hypothesis. In this way the motivation for the semantic shift SISTER → GIRL (*vajzë* ‘girl’ deriving ultimately from PIE *\*swesór-* ‘sister’) and the reconstructed Pre-Albanian derivative *\*māterā* ‘of mother’ (from PIE *meh<sub>2</sub>tereh<sub>2</sub>-*) as stated in Majer’s hypothesis, can be accounted for by means of an interdisciplinary approach, which takes into account linguistic-historical details as well as anthropological features regarding the structure of the extended family, as it surfaces in the Albanian Customary Law Code (*Kanun*).

Linguistic reconstruction shows that these semantic changes have occurred fairly early in the prehistory of Albanian. This assumption goes along with the highly conservative character of the Albanian *Kanun*. Regarding the Indo-European kinship system itself evidence shows that “more kinship terms for males or relatives of male kin can be reconstructed than for females”<sup>37</sup>. Also the reference of the reconstructed form for SISTER, *\*swesór-* from *\*swe-* ‘own’ and *\*sor-* ‘woman’, meaning ‘woman of own kin’ (see above in 1.), refers originally to the kin group/extended family rather than to the nuclear family, accounting for an apparent semantic fuzziness in defining SISTER also in the PIE kinship system structure. The PIE kinship system itself doesn’t fit exactly any of the kinship systems constructed by the anthropologists, but its closest match is the Omaha system, found in patrilineal exogamous societies, where the

<sup>36</sup>Cf. in the Balkans e.g. B/C/S *rōdenī brāt* lit. ‘birth-brother’, as distinguished from *brāt od strīca* lit. ‘brother from uncle’, i.e. ‘cousin’ (Majer 2019: 9).

<sup>37</sup>Fortson 2010: 20.

descent is reckoned through the father's line and spouses are taken from outside the kin group, as in the Albanian one.

### 5. Final remarks

It is assumed that each linguistic change underlies a motivation. With respect to *motër*, really insightful appears here the well-documented evolution of Sp. *hermano*, Port. *irmão*, Cat. *germà* descending from Lat. *germanus*, a derivative of *germen* 'seed' (see above in 1.). It comes from an elliptic construction *frater germanus* 'full sibling', a subordinate term compared to *frater* 'brother'. Clearly, at some point in Latin the need arose to distinguish between SIBLING and FULL SIBLING, as the same construct in Old Italian shows: *fratello germano* 'full brother', which has prompted the use of *germano*, *germana* in the meaning 'brother; sister' (actually outdated), as in the aforementioned Iberian languages.

Linguists have sought to describe and classify the so-called change-triggering forces, i.e. the motivations that cause semantic change to occur. A. Blank<sup>38</sup> and later J. Grzega<sup>39</sup> have summarized the motivations that underlie the semantic change; Blank mentions among other the *sociocultural* and the *cultural/encyclopaedic forces*, while Grzega, who enlarges consistently the list, distinguishes also the *fuzziness* (i.e., difficulties in classifying the referent or attributing the right word to the referent, thus mixing up designations) and the *dominance of the prototype* (i.e. fuzzy difference between

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<sup>38</sup>Blank, Andreas; Koch, Peter (1999), Introduction: *Historical Semantics and Cognition*, in Blank, Andreas; Koch, Peter (eds.), *Historical Semantics and Cognition*, Berlin/New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 1-16

<sup>39</sup>Grzega, Joachim (2004), *Bezeichnungswandel: Wie, Warum, Wozu? Ein Beitrag zur englischen und allgemeinen Onomasiologie*, Heidelberg: Winter.

superordinate and subordinate term due to the monopoly of the prototypical member of a category in the real world). Especially Grzega's above mentioned categories apply very well to the semantic changes discussed here.

In conclusion it can be demonstrated that some kinship concepts entrenched in the frame of the Albanian extended family show a notional fluctuation, which is a consequence of the reference-changing within the same frame (cf. above *prindje*, originally 'parents', extending to the adult relatives living in the same household or *bijë* 'daughter', which may refer to the household and not to its biological parents). There is also a high probability of tracing back formally *vajzë* 'girl' to PIE *\*swesor-* 'sister'. Therefore it is reasonable to assume a causal relation between the semantic changes in *motër* 'sister' < PALb. *\*māterā* < PIE *\*meh<sub>2</sub>t(e)reh<sub>2</sub>* 'of mother; motherly' and *vajzë* 'girl' < PALb. *\*vēharë*, *\*var(ë)* < PIE *\*swesor-* 'sister', thus approving Hamp's hypothesis. These semantic changes date back to the prehistory of the Albanian language, as shown by the phonetic reconstruction of their preforms, so being destined to remain undocumented. Nevertheless the documented reference-changes in *prindje* and *bijë*, triggered by the anthropological circumstances discussed above, offer a plausible analogy to account for the anthropological motivation underlying the semantic changes in *motër* 'sister' and *vajzë* 'girl'.



#### ABBREVIATIONS

Alb.	Albanian
B/C/S	Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian
Cat.	Catalan
Dial.	dialectal form
Eng.	English
Ger.	German
Goth.	Gothic
Gr.	Ancient Greek
IE	Indo-European
Lat.	Latin
Mod. Alb.	Modern Albanian
N.	Northern

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